

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A method of directing communications in a communications

5 network, comprising:

identifying a non-unique receiver identifier-enabled communication initiated by a user on a communications network;

retrieving a non-unique receiver identifier from the non-unique receiver identifier-enabled communication;

10 associating the non-unique receiver identifier with a unique receiver identifier using a record associated with the user; and

connecting the communication to the unique receiver identifier via the communications network.

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2. The method of claim 1, wherein the user communicates with a receiver associated with the unique receiver identifier without transmitting the unique receiver identifier over the communications network.

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3. The method of claim 1, wherein the user is enabled to receive a communication from another user without requiring a transmission of a unique identifier associated with the other user over the communications network.

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4. The method of claims 1, wherein using a non-unique identifier renders the communication at least partially anonymous.

30 5. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is initiated through an electronic mail client.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is initiated through a wireless device.

5 7. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is initiated through a voice device.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is initiated through a web browser.

10 9. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is received through an electronic mail client.

15 10. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is received through a wireless device.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is received through a voice device.

20 12. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is received through a web browser.

25 13. The method of claim 1, further including:
providing a service provider network residing on the
communications network for performing the identifying, the
retrieving, the associating, and the connecting.

30 14. The method of claim 1, further including:
allowing the user to create a non-unique receiver
identifier associated with a receiver.

15. The method of claim 13, wherein the user initiates the communication via an electronic mail client.

16. The method of claim 13, wherein the user initiates the
5 communication via a wireless device.

17. The method of claim 13, wherein the user initiates the communication via a voice device

10 18. The method of claim 13, wherein the user initiates the communication via a web browser.

19. The method of claim 1, further including:
allowing the user to change a unique identifier associated
15 with a receiver; and
updating one or more records that point to the unique identifier.

20. The method of claim 1, wherein the user uses a plurality of non-unique identifiers to represent a single unique receiver.

21. The method of claim 1, wherein a plurality of unique users use a plurality of non-unique identifiers to represent a
25 single common receiver.

22. The method of claim 1, wherein a plurality of unique users use a single non-unique receiver identifier to represent a single unique receiver.

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23. The method of claim 1, wherein a plurality of unique users use a single non-unique receiver identifier to communicate with a plurality of unique receivers.

5 24. The method of claim 1, wherein a plurality of unique users uses a single non-unique receiver identifier to communicate with a group of plurality of related unique receivers.

10 25. The method of claim 1, wherein a user is enabled to create and use a non-unique receiver identifier regardless of one or more non-unique receiver identifiers created by other users.

15 26. The method of claim 1, wherein a non-unique receiver identifier created is distributed across a network of a plurality of service providers.

20 27. The method of claim 1, wherein the identifying, the retrieving, the associating, and the communicating is performed across a distributed network of multiple service providers.

25 28. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is performed independent of a specific service provider in a distributed network.

30 29. The method of claims 1, further including:
 allowing the user and a receiver to communicate with one another using only the non-unique receiver identifier.

30 30. The method of claim 1, further including:

allowing the user to disable further communication from a receiver associated with the non-unique receiver identifier.

31. The method of claim 1, further including:
5 allowing a receiver associated with the non-unique receiver identifier to disable further communication from the user.

32. The method of claim 1, wherein the connecting further includes allowing a receiver associated with the non-unique
10 receiver identifier to communicate with the user using the non-unique receiver identifier and a non-unique identifier associated with the user.

33. The method of claim 1, further including:
15 determining if the user is a registered user, and if it is determined that the user is not a registered user, requesting the user to register.

34. The method of claim 33, further including:
20 if the user selects to register, creating a user repository storing one or more unique receiver identifiers and associated one or more non-unique receiver identifiers.

35. A program storage device readable by machine, tangibly
25 embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform method steps of directing communications in a communications network, comprising:
30 identifying a non-unique receiver identifier-enabled communication initiated by a user on a communications network;

retrieving a non-unique receiver identifier from the non-unique receiver identifier-enabled communication;

associating the non-unique receiver identifier with a unique receiver identifier in record associated with the user; and

5 connecting the communication to the unique receiver identifier via the communications network.

36. The program storage device of claim 35, wherein the user communicates with a receiver associated with the unique receiver identifier without transmitting the unique receiver 10 identifier over the communications network.

37. The program storage device of claim 35, further including:

15 determining if the user is a registered user, and if it is determined that the user is not a registered user, requesting the user to register.

38. The program storage device of claim 37, further including:

20 if the user selects to register, creating a user repository storing one or more unique receiver identifiers and associated one or more non-unique receiver identifiers.

39. A system for directing communications in a 25 communications network, comprising:

a server engine operable to identify a non-unique receiver identifier-enabled communication initiated by a user on a communications network and operable to map a non-unique receiver identifier to a unique receiver identifier, the server 30 engine further operable to direct communication to a receiver associated with the unique receiver identifier.

40. The system of claim 39, further including:
a client repository for storing user information including
at least a client record identifier and one or more unique user
5 identifiers;

a mapping repository for storing at least one or more non-
unique receiver identifiers associated with the client record
identifier and mapped to one or more unique receiver identifiers
by an index to the user information stored in the client
10 repository,

wherein the server engine maps the non-unique receiver
identifier to the unique receiver identifier by retrieving the
index in the mapping repository and indexing the unique receiver
identifier in the client repository.

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41. The system of claim 40, wherein the mapping repository
further includes an active flag record associated with the non-
unique receiver identifier for enabling or disabling
communication to a receiver identified by the non-unique
20 receiver identifier.

42. The method of claim 1, further including:
associating a unique identifier of the user to a non-unique
identifier of the user; and

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the connecting includes connecting the communication to the
unique receiver identifier via the communications network and
presenting the non-unique identifier of the user to the
receiver, wherein the unique identifier of the user is not
revealed to the receiver.

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43. The program storage device of claim 35, further including:

associating a unique identifier of the user to a non-unique identifier of the user;

5 the connecting includes connecting the communication to the unique receiver identifier via the communications network and presenting the non-unique identifier of the user to the receiver, wherein the unique identifier of the user is not revealed to the receiver.

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44. The system of claim 39, wherein the server engine is further operable to map a unique identifier of the user to a non-unique identifier of the user, wherein the server engine directs communication to a receiver associated with the unique 15 receiver identifier and presents the non-unique identifier of the user without presenting the unique identifier of the user.

45. A method of directing communications in a communications network, comprising:

20 receiving a non-unique receiver identifier-enabled communication initiated by a user on a communications network; retrieving a non-unique receiver identifier from the non-unique receiver identifier-enabled communication;

25 determining from the non-unique receiver identifier-enabled communication whether the non-unique receiver identifier needs to be created; and

30 if it is determined that the non-unique receiver identifier needs to be created, retrieving a unique receiver identifier from the non-unique receiver identifier-enabled communication and creating a mapping record associating the unique receiver identifier with the non-unique receiver identifier.

46. The method of claim 45, further including:
connecting the communication to the unique receiver
identifier via the communications network.

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47. A program storage device readable by machine, tangibly
embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to
perform method steps of directing communications in a
communications network, comprising:

10 receiving a non-unique receiver identifier-enabled
communication initiated by a user on a communications network;
retrieving a non-unique receiver identifier from the non-
unique receiver identifier-enabled communication;
determining from the non-unique receiver identifier-enabled
15 communication whether the non-unique receiver identifier needs
to be created; and
if it is determined that the non-unique receiver identifier
needs to be created, retrieving a unique receiver identifier
from the non-unique receiver identifier-enabled communication
20 and creating a mapping record associating the unique receiver
identifier with the non-unique receiver identifier.

48. The program storage device of claim 47, further
including:

25 connecting the communication to the unique receiver
identifier via the communications network.

49. The method of claim 1, further including:
allowing user's unique-identifier to be modified; and

automatically updating the record associated with the user to map data in the record to the user's modified unique-identifier.

5 50. The method of claim 1, further including:
 allowing the unique receiver identifier to be modified; and
 automatically updating data associated with the unique receiver identifier to be associated with the modified unique receiver identifier.

10 51. The method of claim 1, further including:
 automatically determining that the unique receiver identifier is no longer valid;
 automatically requesting a new unique receiver identifier
15 from users that communicate with a receiver associated with the unique receiver identifier;
 if the new unique receiver identifier is received,
 automatically authenticating the new unique receiver identifier;
 and
20 if the new unique receiver identifier is authenticated,
 automatically updating data associated with the unique receiver identifier to map to the new unique receiver identifier.

25 52. A method of directing communications in a communications network, comprising:
 receiving communication recipient's receiver identifier in a communication between a sender and a receiver, the receiver identifier being not necessarily unique;
 determining communication recipient's unique identifier
30 associated with the communication recipient's receiver

identifier from one or more data records associated with at least one of the sender or the receiver; and
directing the communication to the communication recipient's unique identifier.

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